

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 2ND–3RD // THE BOOK OF ACTS

CORNELIUS (ACTS 10:1–8)

To Jews in the First Century, Gentiles were idolatrous and unclean. They had different religious practices, lifestyles, and beliefs that prohibited Jews from having them in their homes and fellowshiping with them.

- The Romans were seen as especially corrupt, as they were Gentile occupiers who heavily taxed and oppressed the Jewish people.

A Gentile could technically convert to Judaism if they underwent circumcision and immersion in a *mikvah* (ritual bath) and fully accepted all the Torah's commandments.

- For a Gentile to become a Jew, they would have had to effectively “renounce” the Gentile world in its totality.
- Conversion was not simply a matter of religious transformation; it was a total social realignment

A MAN NAMED CORNELIUS FROM CAESAREA

Cornelius was a high-ranking officer in the Roman army. He would have overseen 100 soldiers and been paid five times as much as a regular soldier (v. 1).

- He was stationed in Caesarea, which was the capital of the Roman occupation of Israel.
- The Jews hated Caesarea—to them it was a cesspool of idolatry, immorality, and wickedness.

Yet Cornelius feared God. He was not a full-blown proselyte, but he was a Gentile who had abandoned polytheism for the God of Israel.

- He would have most likely observed the Sabbath, followed the 10 Commandments, prayed, and practiced acts of charity (v. 2).

- This was a person who was seeking God yet still very much excluded from the family of God.

WHAT IS THE MOST DESPISED LOCATION IN THE WORLD TO YOU?

Is there a nation, city, or part of the country you could do without? How about a group of people you find immoral, problematic, or evil?

- Take a moment to consider why you feel that way.
- Imagine traveling to that location, working to befriend those you meet there, and offering them the good news of the gospel. Would you?

One afternoon, around 3:00 pm, Cornelius had a vision of an angel who commended him for his worship and directed him to find Peter in Joppa (vs. 3–6).

- This most likely happened during Cornelius's afternoon prayer time.
- Why does prayer matter? And what happens during it? Prayer is our connection point to the supernatural, and God meets with us during it!

Cornelius was not a Christian when he had this vision, but he was a devout worshiper of God who was searching for the truth.

- He had enough spiritual sensitivity to treat a messenger from God (the angel) with honor and respect.
- People who act upon the revelation God has given them will be given more revelation, which will lead them to the truth of the gospel.

So, Cornelius sent servants and a military orderly to Joppa to fetch Peter (vs. 7–8).

- Notice the obedience and urgency with which Cornelius responded to this divine command.
- His faith and the state of his heart are seen in how seriously he took this visitation from God.
- So, how does God respond to those who are hungry for truth and earnestly seeking Him? This story answers that question.

A VISION FROM HEAVEN (ACTS 10:9–16)

Around noon the next day, as Cornelius's people were approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop of where he was staying to pray.

- While he was praying, he was hungry (and probably thinking about food), and he fell into a “trance” (v. 10).
- This was a heightened state of consciousness in preparation for a vision that God was going to give him.

He saw a sheet that descended from Heaven, containing live animals, birds, and even reptiles.

- Then Peter heard God saying to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat” (v. 13).
- For an ethnic Jew who had always diligently kept Kosher laws and obeyed the commands of God to stay away from foods that were “unclean,” this was a troublesome vision. Why would God command Peter to violate the law?

Peter was so troubled by this that he told God, “no,” even as he heard God speak three times.

- Peter had a bad habit of telling Jesus, “no” (Matthew 16:22; John 13:8). We see that bad habits and old mindsets sometimes take a while to break.
- Putting God into a box of limitations is a dangerous thing to do. Now, God would shake Peter up a bit to change his thinking.

MAINTAINING TRADITION OVER FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD

It's very dangerous when our traditions become the primary lens for understanding God and His work in our world (instead of the Bible).

- We think being “open-minded” about what the Bible actually says about certain issues or topics is compromise and a slippery slope to apostasy. This prevents real spiritual growth and greatly limits and even warps our view.

“WHAT GOD HAS MADE CLEAN, DO NOT CALL IMPURE.”

Peter was hungry, so his mind was on food—but God was talking about something more than food.

- In Old Testament thinking, there was “clean/holy” and there was “impure/common.”
- That which was “holy” could be made “common” if it touched something common. It could only be made holy again through ritual cleansing.

To make something holy was called “consecration,” and to make something unclean was called “desecration.”

- In some way, Peter was calling what God Himself had consecrated and cleansed impure!
- What was he calling impure? What was he regarding as not fit to be used by God or touched by God? A certain group of people.
- Is the blood of Jesus enough to make us holy?

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT (ACTS 10:17–33)

It's not a surprise that Peter was inwardly perplexed about the vision. Why would God tell him to disobey a command?

- But as he was pondering the vision's meaning, the men sent by Cornelius arrived. And as they did, the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, telling him to accompany the men wherever they might take him (vs. 17–23).
- The next day, they traveled together to Caesarea.

Peter took Jewish Believers from Joppa with him, and they traveled together with the three Gentiles Cornelius had sent.

- Apparently, they would have had to stay overnight somewhere, as they didn't arrive until the following day (it was an over 30-mile trip).
- Jews and Gentiles didn't hang out together. Imagine the awkwardness of this trip! But God was doing something through it.

As they came to the house of Cornelius, this powerful Roman centurion fell at the feet of Peter in reverence (v. 25).

- Peter's response was to tell him to get up because Peter was only a man, just like Cornelius.
- Side-note: The greatest and most anointed Christian leaders, preachers, or teachers are not to be worshipped as anything more than what they are—they're human beings.

As Peter and Cornelius spent time together, Cornelius recounted his experience and told Peter of what the angel told him.

- As Cornelius explained all that had happened to him and how God had spoken to him, the vision started becoming increasingly clear to Peter.
- As Peter will explain more in Chapter 11, the vision really didn't have much to do with animals at all; the “unclean animals” were a symbol.

As Peter explained to Cornelius in v. 28, it was considered unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation.

- So, what God was saying to Peter through the vision was that he wasn't to call any person common or unclean.
- God said, “What God has made clean, do not call impure.” In other words, the gospel is for ALL PEOPLE, not just the Jews.

The idea that the gospel and Church only belong to select ethnic, social, national, or economic groups is absurd and unbiblical.

- God isn't a white, middle-class, Southern American. So, the Church of Jesus must be bigger than that!
- Therefore, we look for ways to love, serve, and share the gospel with all people, not just those we're comfortable around.

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE (ACTS 10:34–48)

NO CERTAIN NATION HAS EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO GOD (VS. 34–35).

In just a few short sentences, Peter swept away centuries of religious and racial prejudice as he declared that God doesn't play favorites.

- Although God first sent His message of redemption through Christ to Israel, that light has now been extended and offered to all nations.

So, Peter began to explain the message of the gospel to Cornelius and those in his house—how Jesus came, did miracles, and was crucified, but then resurrected and appeared to His disciples (vs. 37–41).

- Peter told everyone listening that they were simply witnesses of this truth.
- But the meat of it all, the meaning behind the Christ/Messiah, is found in v. 43.

“...everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (v. 43).

- Imagine spending what might have been years believing in, worshipping, and praying to God, not sure quite what you needed to do to be made right with Him and absolved of the things you had done wrong. You would have wondered, “What kind of good works (and how many) do I have to do to get right with God?”

Then God sends you an angel, who directs you to a messenger, who tells you that to receive forgiveness you don't have to “do” anything—you just have to believe in His Son Jesus.

- What kind of relief, joy, and peace must Cornelius have felt to know that his salvation wasn't dependent on him but on God?
- As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit “came down on all those who heard the message” (v. 44).

The pent-up emotions from the previous days' events, as well as the overwhelming realization that God was at work, now gave way to a dramatic encounter with the power of God.

- The Holy Spirit fell and the Gentiles began “speaking in tongues” and praising God (v. 46).
- This was essentially a Gentile day of Pentecost—a verification that salvation is for them also.

The Holy Spirit was opening a new chapter in the spread of salvation to the ends of the earth. The Gentiles can also be children of Abraham—not through circumcision or the law but by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone.

- All of those who came to Christ were baptized and became part of the family of God.
- The account ends with Peter staying with the Gentile family for a few days (v. 48).

GOD DOESN'T PLAY FAVORITES

- If you've ever felt unworthy, not good enough, not smart enough, not spiritual enough, or like you've made too many mistakes to be a part of God's family, you're not alone.
- But you are also mistaken. God's love and desire for you aren't dependent on your performance.
- It's dependent on His character.
- If you've ever looked down your nose and felt like you were a little bit better than someone else because of their past mistakes, ethnicity, economic status, social standing, how they vote, or what they believe, you're not alone.
- But when you do that, you're wrong.
- God's love for people isn't dependent on their performance but on His character.
- How would your relationship with God change if you allowed yourself to believe that He loves you regardless of your performance?
- How would your relationship with others change if you started viewing your prejudice and unmerited judgment of others as sin?
- When was the last time you reached out to someone different than you to share the love of Christ?